

Talking Points: US Benchmarks and General Political Situation, May 6, 2007

Key Words:

1. *Nothing new in the US “benchmarks”*
2. *Renewed international involvement can only succeed with a clear, agreed-upon end-game*
3. *Arab Peace Initiative = Full peace for full withdrawal and an agreed solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees*
4. *Rice/Wolfensohn: “The best way to improve security for Palestinians and Israelis is to create economic opportunity for Palestinians.”*
5. The only secure border is an agreed border.
6. A viable and secure peace/a viable two-state solution
7. Negotiate our freedom, not renegotiate the terms of our imprisonment (Camp David)
8. Israeli settlers may have left Gaza, but Israel didn’t leave Gaza alone/**Gaza still occupied**
9. **Draw a Red Line at the Green Line.**
10. **occupied** East Jerusalem
11. assume **responsibility for our own lives and economy**

Talking Points:

General—Palestinian Frame:

- We are extremely encouraged by renewed US interest in resolving the conflict. If presented within a larger political framework, the US benchmarks could be an important tool in peacemaking.
- Palestinians simply seek freedom from occupation and peace. For nearly 40 years, we have had no control over our lives and generations of children have grown up in virtual prisons. We want a future with hope and opportunity.
- Just before the 40th anniversary of occupation, the **reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative** creates an historic opportunity: Full peace with Israel in exchange for full withdrawal and an **agreed upon** resolution to the plight of Palestinian refugees.
- Seven years of unilateralism and bloodshed is enough. True peace and true security can only be reached through agreement. Time to talk.

What are the benchmarks and why are they so important?:

- The US benchmarks are a detailed list of objectives and timeline to get Israelis and Palestinians to implement what they already agreed to in 2005: the Agreement on Movement and Access.
- **There is nothing new in the US “benchmarks.”** What is new is renewed US interest in getting Israel to abide by its agreements and jumpstarting the peace process.

- The benchmarks are not what's important; creating a political process to get **both Israelis and Palestinians** back to the negotiating table now is. We have an historic opportunity with the Arab Peace Initiative.
- The benchmarks are nothing but a rephrase for the Israeli obligations under previous agreements. Its implementation is a tangible measure for achieving peace. Israel's rejection to the benchmarks is a dangerous obstacle on the way towards the political horizon and is an indicator that the horizon is only getting further and further.

What's the Palestinian position on the benchmarks?:

- Any renewed international interest in getting the parties back to the negotiating table is welcome: *the only secure peace is an agreed peace.*
- Even though *there is nothing new in the US benchmarks*, the benchmarks could be an important tool in generating momentum for peace, **but only if presented within a larger political framework.** [The Arab Peace Initiative creates that framework].
- We are concerned, however, that the benchmarks could be used as an attempt to water down the Agreement on Movement and Access. **If that happens, both Palestinians and Israelis will lose.**
 - The AMA wasn't just about easing restrictions on goods and people moving through two Gaza checkpoints. Rather, it was about creating economic opportunity throughout the entire occupied Palestinian territory.
 - The AMA also called for opening an airport and seaport in Gaza, a bus convoy to facilitate transportation to and from the West Bank, and easing the movement restrictions in the West Bank.
 - If the benchmarks are fully implemented, they will still fall far short of full implementation of the AMA.
 - **KEY FACT:** *Benchmarks set a target date for getting 150 export trucks out of Karni. The AMA established a target of 400 export trucks through Karni in December 2005, in addition to an unlimited number of agricultural exports.*
 - *The World Bank and the UN identify restrictions on the Movement of Palestinian People as the direct cause of the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*
 - **KEY FACT:** The UN has counted 548 permanent obstacles to movement in the West Bank, of which 83 are manned. **This is a 45% increase in the number of obstacles since the AMA was concluded.**
- The AMA was concluded based on simple premise, reiterated time and time again by Rice, Wolfensohn, and Bush: The best way to improve security for both Palestinians and Israelis is to create economic opportunity for Palestinians.
 - The benchmarks should be viewed only as a tool in achieving this larger goal.

- We just want to take responsibility over our own lives and economies. Since the AMA was concluded, however, we've seen our GDP fall by 10%, EU aid rise by 26%, and an unprecedented humanitarian and political crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory.
- **Implementation of the benchmarks is key.** The success of negotiating the AMA demonstrates the strength of a strong and engaged third party. The failure of its implementation shows that we need the same commitment in implementation.
 - The benchmarks could provide an important opening if it signals renewed commitment from the international community to help both Palestinians and Israelis negotiate and properly implement.
 - *Each party's obligations in the benchmarks, including security obligations, should be evaluated independently.*

Fine. But how realistic is this with the Winograd inquiry and Olmert who has no approval rating?

- We don't like to comment on Israeli internal matters. We just hope that the Israeli people don't allow whoever is in power to lose an historic opportunity for peace. Peace shouldn't be held hostage to internal Israeli politics.

Israeli Unilateralism—Israel unilaterally took a huge step for peace and withdrew completely from the Gaza Strip; all they got in return was rockets aimed at school buses; now you want them to negotiate with you?:

- The only secure border is an agreed border.
- Israel's illegal settlers may have left Gaza, but Israel didn't leave Gaza alone. Instead, it tightened its control, leading UN Special Human Rights Rapporteur John Dugard to recently say that "Gaza is a prison and Israel seems to have thrown away the key."
 - Since Israel evacuated its settlers from the Gaza Strip, Palestinians can't get to work and school, much less feed themselves.
 - Deep poverty rose from just over 20% to just under 80% in the eight months following "Disengagement," all because Israel refused to allow the free movement of people and goods.
 - **FACT:** *The Agreement of Movement and Access, brokered by Condoleezza Rice months before the Hamas elections, would have allowed improved freedom of movement for people and goods through Gaza's crossing points, including Rafah with Egypt, an airport, a seaport, a link to the West Bank, and easing of internal movement in the West Bank.*
- When Israel negotiates with its neighbors, it gets peace, as with Jordan and Egypt. When Israel refuses to talk, both Israel and her neighbors suffer, as with Lebanon and Gaza.

Previous Failures—the Camp David “No Partner for Peace” Myth—Israel offered everything at Camp David, and Arafat wanted more. How is peace possible if Palestinians won’t compromise?:

- Camp David offered a Swiss cheese state with no real sovereignty in occupied East Jerusalem, no control over its borders or airspace, and no real resolution to the plight of Palestinian refugees. We were, and are, looking to achieve freedom—not to renegotiate the terms of our imprisonment.
- Camp David happened in July 2000. Negotiations continued 6 months later at Taba, where Palestinians and Israelis closed many gaps. Violence had erupted after Sharon’s armed visit to the Haram Al-Sharif and political leaders were too weak to reach a final agreement.
- Palestinians made their historic compromise in 1988 when they recognized Israel’s existence on 78% of historic Palestine. We just wish Israel would accept our right to exist on the remaining 22%.

Previous Failures—the Roadmap to Nowhere—You had an internationally-backed Roadmap to a Palestinian state; Palestinians just had to fulfill certain obligations to show they were serious about peace; but instead, they chose terror:

- The Roadmap is an important basis for any negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The problem is it didn’t **define a destination**. For Palestinians and Israelis to get on the same road together, we both have to know exactly where we’re going, and that we want to be there.
- Israel never upheld any of its obligations under the Roadmap, most importantly a settlement freeze. All of Israel’s settlements are illegal, as reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice in July 2004. Nothing justifies Israel’s relentless theft of Palestinian land and resources.

Looking Forward—Rehashing history won’t get us anywhere; what needs to be done now for peace?

- We don’t need to argue history. We do, however, need to learn from our previous failures. This time, we cannot afford to fail—the stakes are too high.
- We will fail if we don’t address the fundamentals of the conflict. After nearly 40 years of occupation, the only thing that’s never been tried is giving Palestinians their freedom and ending the occupation. *See TPs on “Disengagement” and Gaza still being occupied.*

What can the International community do?

- We need a strong and involved third party —*both during the negotiation process and most importantly during implementation*. If there’s one thing Palestinians and Israelis have proven, it’s that what we can’t do it alone.

- We also need the international community to strike a fair and balanced approach to the Conflict: If the int'l cmnty cares about the Two-State Solution, it must draw a Red Line at the Green Line.
 - Two months ago, the French President called for another Middle East Peace Initiative to implement the Two-State Solution. At the same time, two French companies were building a train linking Israeli settlements to West Jerusalem—essentially dismantling the Two-State solution.
 - We just need the international community to abide by its own laws—stop allowing trade with settlements; stop letting foreign companies work in and profit off of illegal settlements.

Israeli Security—Isn't it true there would be no need for the Wall if Palestinians would just stop blowing themselves up in Israeli pizzerias?

- If Israel wants a Wall, build it on its own territory, not ours. The main problem with the Wall is its route.
- [The International Court of Justice deemed all sections of the Wall built on occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, illegal.]
- The best security is peace. For 3 years, from the end of 1997 to the end of 2000, not one Israeli civilian was killed inside Israel by an act of Palestinian political violence—this is because negotiations were happening and both Palestinians and Israelis had hope. [**Careful** with the wording on this one: the exact dates are critically important, and the definitions are important]

National Unity: Isn't any talk of negotiations useless when Palestinians won't recognize Israel and when Palestinians are killing each other?

- Palestinian National Unity is critical for regional stability.
- The basis of the new government practically and implicitly accepts the Quartet conditions. We wish Israel would finally accept the fact of our existence and our right to exist—something Israel has never done.
- The National Unity Agreement incorporates the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for normal relations between Israel and all of her neighbors if it would just withdraw completely from the occupied Palestinian territory and agree a just solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees.
- One year before there were three Quartet conditions for Hamas, there were six Quartet conditions for Israel: All had to do with easing the economic stranglehold on Palestinians. None of them have been implemented by Israel.

Haram Al-Sharif and Jerusalem:

- Why now? This is a provocation. It is against international law and the Agreement with the Waqf. Regardless, this is such a sensitive place during the

most sensitive of times—why now, after the Mecca Agreement and before the Tripartite summit?

- We hope Israel will immediately halt the construction work and coordinate with the Islamic Waqf, which is what it is required to do by Agreement.
- Jewish extremists are bent on destroying the Haram Al-Sharif and reconstructing the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem in its place. These groups ties to some working near the compound and the Israeli governments breach of international law and the Waqf agreement contribute to fears that something is rotten in Denmark.
- The work at Haram al-Sharif is part of a larger assault on Jerusalem and the Two-State Solution. Israel is trying to unilaterally impose a solution on Jerusalem and the Holy Sites.
 - East Jerusalem is being severed from the rest of the West Bank, endangering the future of its ancient communities of Christian and Muslim Palestinians.
 - Historically, Metropolitan East Jerusalem (including Ramallah and Bethlehem), accounted for 30 to 40% of all economic activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip combined.
 - Without occupied East Jerusalem, there can be no viable Palestinian state; without a viable Palestinian state, there will be no viable and sustainable peace.